

Women In India- Traversing Through The Timeline

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Abstract: India has been developing fast, but not always equitably or inclusively. Our development model is very much a work in progress and deep-rooted challenges remain. The biggest issue we face is the empowerment of women. Across the world, educating and empowering women has proven time and again to be the catalyst for rapid socio-economic growth. Conversely, societies where women are repressed are among the most backward. India seems to be somewhere in-between. The present study is a conceptual study of the women in the Indian context and the developmental path over the years.

Keywords: Legal Framework, Empowerment, Development

Introduction

Women are the gift to the society. During ancient period of India, women played a significant role. The Rig Vedic Women in India enjoyed high status in society. Their condition was good. The women were provided opportunity to attain high intellectual and spiritual standard. There were many women Rishis during this period. Though monogamy was mostly common, the richer section of the society indulged in polygamy. There was no sati system or early marriage. But from enjoying free and esteemed positions in the Rig-Vedic society, women started being discriminated against since the Later-Vedic period in education and other rights and facilities. Child marriage, widow burning, the purdah and polygamy further worsened the women's position. The epics and Puranas equated women with property. Even Buddhism did little for women. Though the Maurya kings often employed female bodyguards, spies and 'Striadyaksha mahamatras', their status was still quite bad. Upper caste ladies had to accept the purdah.

During this period men were polygamous and widow burning was an accepted norm. Arthashastra imposed more stigmas on women as Kautilya dismissed women's liberation and they were not free even to go elsewhere without husband's permission. They became worse off in the Gupta period. The Smritishastras abused them; Manu dictated a woman would be dependent on her father in childhood, on her husband in youth and on her son in old age. Apart from child marriage and sati, prostitution and Devadasi system became widespread.

A History Of India And Its Women

Four issues affecting the women's movement in India require careful consideration:

- The tensions and fractures in the movement.
- The way these fractures are related to women's relationship to the nation-state, which at least partly follows from women being "owned" by their families, communities, and even nation.
- The possibility of managing or transcending differences among women to create a political community to which women will belong by voluntary association rather than by ownership.
- The significance of women's agency in gender politics.

Status Of Women During British Rule In India

After the fall of Mughal empire, the British established their supremacy over the Indian people. During British rule, lots of changes were made in the economic and social structures of our society. Though the quality of life of women during this period remained more or less the same, some substantial progress was achieved in eliminating inequalities between men and women. Social evils such as child marriage, Sati Pratha, devdasi system, Pardah pratha, prohibition of widow remarriage etc. which were great hurdles in the path of women's progress, were either controlled by the efforts of reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Vidya Sagar or removed by suitable legislations. Many women reformers such as Pandita Ramabai also fight for the disabilities of women. Women like Bhikaji Cama, Dr. Annie Besant, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Aruna Asaf Ali, Sucheta Kriplani etc. played an important role in India's independence struggle. Sarojini Naidu, a poet and freedom

fighter, was the first Indian women to become president of the Indian National Congress and the first women to become the governor of a state in India.

Status Of Women In Post Independent India

Revolutionary changes have taken place in the status of Indian women after independence. Cultural and Structural changes reduce exploitation of women to a great extent and provide equality of opportunities to women in various fields. The women have left the secured domain of their home and are now in the battle field of life, fully armored with their talent. Now, there is no arena which remained unconquered by Indian women. Female activists also united over issues as female infanticide, gender bias, women's health, women's safety and women's literacy.

Dimensions and Parameters of Women Empowerment

The process of empowerment has five dimensions, viz. Cognitive, psychological, economic, political and physical:

- i. The cognitive dimension refers to women having an understanding of the conditions and causes of their subordination at the micro and macro levels. It involves making choices that may go against cultural expectations and norms;
- ii. The psychological dimension includes the belief that women can act at personal and societal levels to improve their individual realities and the society in which they live;
- iii. The economic component requires that women have access to, and control over, productive resources, thus ensuring some degree of financial autonomy. However she notes that changes in the economic balance of power do not necessarily alter traditional gender roles or norms;
- iv. The political element entails that women have the capability to analyse, organise and mobilize for social change; and
- v. There is a physical element of gaining control over one's body and sexuality and the ability to protect oneself against sexualviolence to the empowerment process.⁶ The parameters of women empowerment are:

Gender Budgeting In India

As the nodal Ministry for women, the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) has been undertaking several initiatives for the empowerment of women. In this context, Gender Budgeting (GB) has been adopted by the Government as a tool for ensuring that adequate budgetary commitments are made for women. To build capacities of functionaries and stakeholders at all levels, a Gender Budget Scheme was launched in the XI Plan. As part of this Scheme, the Ministry sponsored training programmes and workshops at the Centre and in the States, developed training material, undertook direct interactive sessions with identified Ministries and provided technical support on GB in training courses organised by other organizations.

Checklists for implementing Gender Budgeting by the various Ministries have been laid down and this Ministry is continuously taking up with the other Ministries as well as the state governments to carry forward this exercise. The Scheme also had a component for setting up a Gender Budgeting Cell (GBC) in the MWCD. In view of the growing GB awareness in both the Central Ministries as well as state governments, the demand for capacity building and technical support has been rising. Further, while detailed training manuals have been prepared for the use of the trainers for Central Ministries, the same need to be developed for state governments. Gender Audit is another emerging area which needs to be focused. To start with, appropriate training modules /manuals are required to be developed and capacities built in gender auditing. The GBC of the Ministry needs to be set up fully to provide support to the growing GB activities.

Review Of Literature

(Sen, 2000)

The women's movement in India took off in the 1920s, building on the 19th century social reform movement. The women's movement progressed during the period of high nationalism and the freedom struggle, both of which shaped its contours. Among the many achievements of the movement, the most significant were the constitutional guarantees of equal rights for women and universal adult suffrage in independent India. However, these guarantees did little to bring about social and material change in the lives of most Indian women. A New Women's movement, articulated to mass and popular politics, emerged in the 1970s. **(Sen, 2000)**

(Singh, 2013)

For centuries women were not treated equal to men in many ways. They were not allowed to own property, they did not have a Share in the property of their parents, they had no voting rights, and they had no freedom to choose their work or job and so on. Gender inequality has been part and parcel of an accepted male-dominated Indian society throughout history.

Women were expected to be bound to the house, while men went out and worked. This division of labor was one of the major reasons why certain evils like 'Sati Pratha', 'Pardah System', 'Child Marriage', 'Dowry System', etc. took birth in our society. The traditional Indian mentality assumes that the place of women is mainly concentrated to the household activities like kitchen work and upbringing of the children. There is systematic discrimination against women economically, socially, politically and culturally more so, in India. These discriminations & disabilities are practiced at all levels day in & day out. Women Empowerment is the ability of women to exercise full control over their actions. This means control over material assets, intellectual resources and even over their ideologies. It involves, at the psychological level, women's ability to assert them which has, so far, been constricted by the 'gender roles' assigned to them especially in a culture like India which resists changes.

(Seema, 2013)

deals with the issue of women development in Indian society. A large number of policies, programmes and projects are designed to raise the status of women in development process. Women development is considered as a part of national development by Indian government. In India from first five year plan to fifth five year plans, Indian planners were concerned with helping women to fulfill their domestic roles in a more efficient way. From second plan onwards to the sixth plan women's welfare became a sub-heading under social welfare. In India so many schemes will start for empowering women's in terms of social and economic condition. Our government takes so many initiatives for the development of women.

Women Development In India Under The five- Year Plans

Five- Year Plans

In the first twenty years of planning and development, women's concerns in state policies were mainly driven under welfare approach considering that motherhood and child rearing is the most important and significant role of women. With regard to women, following factors influenced the overall approach:

1. The objectives of economic growth were given precedence over objectives of social transformation.
2. Gender inequalities and subordination of women were not viewed as problems requiring attention and remedial measures and
3. Promotion of women's domestic duties as their legitimate and desired role.

First Five-Year Plan (1951-56)

For women's development voluntary social welfare board at the centre and in the states were set up. Major indications are:

- To support enrolment and mobilization of girls in schools at the primary level and at the university stage, emphasize was on vocational education, to take up employment immediately
- To make efforts of education so that women become better mothers and manage their household in an economical and efficient manner.
- To encourage training of women doctors, midwives and dais to provide better childbirth and health services for women.
- To develop the employability of women through technical training

Second Five-Year Plan (1956-61)

This duration did not enunciate any new goals of development for women. However, stress was:

- To promote girl's education through parents and to make education more relevant to girl's needs and employment of women teachers
- To improve maternal and child health but the emphasis was more on children.
- To take care of women's physical and biological disabilities at the work place while allotting types of work in the field of labor.

Third Five-Year Plan (1961-66)

This plan continued to lay emphasis on the welfare aspect of women. Increased allocation for the central social welfare board, which was the main instrument of state activity, was also recommended. Increased assistance to voluntary organizations working in this field was encouraged. Approach of women development during third plan was:

- To link health, the maternal and child welfare services with the general health facilities and referral institutions.
- To encourage family planning by adoption of the oral pill, a relatively new method of family planning at that time.

Fourth Five-Year Plan (1969-74) And Fifth Five-Year Plan (1974-79)

No new initiatives were indicated. The policy parameters continued to stress on an approach, through the social welfare board, of assisting voluntary organizations dealing with the welfare of women.

Sixth Five-Year Plan (1974-79)

It stressed that the main strategy for women's development in the previous plans was three-fold-education, employment and health. Approach to women development during Sixth Five Year Plan was:

- To increase enrolment of girls at the elementary level, promotion of functional literacy and encouraging the promotion of education for women in backward areas and
- To improve health and family welfare, maternal and child welfare services and attention was paid to women's nutrition needs.
- To generate more skilled and unskilled employment through vocational training and support services.

However, on agriculture and industry side no new schemes for the employment of women were made however, integrated Rural Development Programs (IRDP) was launched.

Seventh Five-Year Plan (1985-90)

The Seventh Five Year Plan (1986-1991) targeted concepts of equity and empowerment propagated globally by the United Nations Decade for women it emphasized.

- To empower women by generating awareness of their rights and privileges.
- To train women for more productive economic activity.
- To develop support services to reduce the excessive daily burden of domestic work on women.
- To enhance women's access to science and technology to promote their participation in creation of a sustainable environment.
- To promote women's corporations for every state with the centre and state governments participation, at 50:50 funding.
- The plan further commented upon the implementation of the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWACRA) programme.

Eighth Five –Year Plan (1992-97)

The Department of Women and Child Development also prepared a plan of action for women for 1989-2000 and set up the Shram Shakti commission for evaluating the functioning of women in the informal sector and for suggesting steps for ameliorating their condition.

India's Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002)

'Empowerment of Women' being one of the primary objectives of the ninth plan, every effort will be made to create an enabling environment where women can freely exercise their rights both within and outside home, as equal partners, along with men. This will be realized through early finalization and adoption of the 'national policy for empowerment of women' which laid down definite goals, targets and policy prescriptions along with a well-defined gender development index to monitor the impact of its implementation in raising the status of women from time to time.

Approach Paper To The Tenth Five-Year Plan (2000-07)

It also includes the expansion of economic and social opportunities for all individuals and groups, reduction in disparities and a greater participation in the decision making process.

Monitor Able Targets For The Tenth Plan And beyond

- All children in school by 2003, all children to complete 5 years of schooling by 2007.
- Increase in literacy rate to 75% within the plan period.
- Reduction of infant mortality rate (IMR) to 45 per 1000 live births by 2007 and to 28 by 2012.
- Reduction of maternal mortality ratio (MMR) to 2 per 1000 live births by 2007 and 1 by 2012.
- Increase in forest and tree cover to 25% by 2007 and 33% by 2012.
- All villages to have sustained access to potable drinking water within the plan period.

Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007-2012)

In the eleventh plan, for the first time, women are recognized not just as equal citizens but as agents of economic and social growth. The approach to gender equity is based on the recognition that interventions in favour of women must be multi-pronged and they must be:

1. Provide women with basic entitlements,

2. Address the reality of globalization and its impact on women by prioritizing economic empowerment,
3. Ensure an environment free from all forms of violence against women (VAW)- physical, economic, social, psychological etc.

Changing Position Of Women Legal Provisions -21st Century Perspectives

Social change is an inevitable phenomenon of every society because social conditions never remain static. Social change whether it comes through legislation or through judicial interpretation. The changing pattern does have an impact on the laws and the life of a given society and law must keep pace with the changing socio-economic trends and political movements of the society, while at same time preserving necessary balance between individual rights and duties. Thus law and justice provide a potential force for the attainment of a progressive social change. The exalted status of Indian women in ancient days suffered a setback in the medieval period. Social, economic and political factors played a major role in their suppression.

Social inhibitions and discriminatory practices against them continued to exist during the enlightened and civilized imperial rule. The leadership of independent movement was, however, committed to accord an equal status to women and give them a place of honor, and dignity in the society. Accordingly the constitution – the fundamental laws- as emerged out of the constituent assembly, treated both men and women equally and also provided for protective discrimination for women in view of their peculiar position in the human society.

Though the constitution has provided equality of both the sexes man and women but biological condition of the female and developed sense of subordination demand extra protection for them. The reason is that women's physical structure and the performance of certain functions place her at a disadvantage in the struggle for subsistence and her physical well-being becomes an object of public interest and care in order to preserve the strength and vigor of the race. Thus the law and justice demands additional privileges and safeguards for maintaining proper socio-legal status of women in the society.

Conclusion

The informal sector includes jobs such as domestic servant, small trader, artisan, or field laborer on a family farm. Most of these jobs are unskilled and low paying and do not provide benefits to the worker. More importantly, however, cultural practices vary from region to region. Though it is a broad generalization, North India tends to be more patriarchal and feudal than South India. Women in northern India have more restrictions placed on their behavior, thereby restricting their access to work. Southern India tends to be more egalitarian, women have relatively more freedom, and women have a more prominent presence in society. Cultural restrictions however are changing, and women are freer to participate in the formal economy, though the shortage of jobs throughout the country contributes to low female employment. But in the recent years, conditions of working women in India have improved considerably. More and more women find themselves in positions of respect and prestige, more and more workplaces are now populated with women who work on equal terms as men. Working is no longer an adjustment, a mere necessity; but a means to self-worth and growth.

Women have now not only found their place in work places but are also party to governance. In recent years there have been explicit moves to increase women's political participation. Women have been given representation in the Panchayati Raj system as a sign of political empowerment. There are many elected women representatives at the village council level. At the central and state levels too women are progressively making a difference. Today we have women Chief Ministers in five large states of India. The Women's reservation policy bill is slated to further strengthen political participation.

At the end we can conclude that although the changes are occurring slowly but there is an advent of social reforms and strengthening of women in India in late 20th century and hence being at the beginning of 21st century we can hope for the bright future of women in India whereby they can claim to be really equal to the men in every field of life.

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